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IT is strange how often in matters of art the accident of time forces a comparison between talents that have but little in common. In our own day we are all familiar with the controversy so often renewed, and always so fruitlessly waged, over the respective claims of two distinguished novelists. It is almost impossible in any general company to speak warmly of Dickens without arousing a counterblast in favour of Thackeray, or to mention the author of *Vanity Fair* without being instantly challenged for a judgment upon the merits of *Pickwick*. The history of English painting offers an example of the same unlucky predicament. In the art of the eighteenth century the names of Reynolds and Gainsborough are inseparably linked together, and the individual genius of these distinguished painters is nearly always appraised by an exhaustive process of comparison that sometimes does less than justice to both. Nor is it altogether possible even at this time to escape from inveterate usage. In reality they were men of opposite temperament, very differently endowed by nature, and offering in their work the most striking contrasts of system and style; and yet so narrow was the world of art in which they moved, so little liberty of choice did it afford even to men of the highest eminence in their profession, that Reynolds and Gainsborough were forced into constant competition from the mere fact that they were continually engaged in a common employment. Out of necessity, rather than by any process of election, they became the rival portrait-painters of their day. At that time, indeed, it was difficult for a painter to hope for success in any other branch of art, or to resist the rewards which the successful practice of portraiture so freely offered. And yet it may be doubted, in spite of the fame they enjoyed, whether in either case the artist's ambition was fully satisfied. Reynolds, as we know, even to the end of his long life, was dreaming of the greater achievements of the art of Italy. While he was busily engaged with a host of fashionable sitters, his secret and unsatisfied longing was to follow in the footsteps of Michael Angelo, and his last injunction to the students gathered around him was that they should seek to acquire that grandeur and nobility of design which he had been forced merely to admire.

Gainsborough too must have had his regrets, but how different in kind. In the midst of his successes in Bath or in London, his thoughts would wander back, not to the achievements of an earlier time, but to the pleasant scenes in which he had passed his boyhood. It must have been with something of bitterness that he noted his growing fame as a painter of portraits, and the comparative indifference with which the fashionable public by whom he was employed regarded those studies of English landscape that gave to the artist himself a keener pleasure and a higher enjoyment. "Gainsborough's landscapes," says Sir William Beechey, "stood ranged in long lines from his hall to his painting room, and they who came to sit to him for their portraits rarely deigned to honour them with a look as they passed them." And yet it was as a lover of outward nature that Gainsborough first asserted his powers as an artist; and if we are to judge his work aright we must never